

Ludwig II of Bavaria

Ludwig II	
	
Ludwig in c. 1874	
King of Bavaria	
Reign	10 March 1864 – 13 June 1886
Predecessor	Maximilian II
Successor	Otto
Full name	
Ludwig Otto Friedrich Wilhelm	
House	House of Wittelsbach
Father	Maximilian II of Bavaria
Mother	Marie of Prussia
Born	25 August 1845 Nymphenburg Palace
Died	13 June 1886 (aged 40) Lake Starnberg
Burial	St. Michael's Church, Munich
Religion	Catholic

Ludwig II (Ludwig Otto Friedrich Wilhelm;^[1] sometimes rendered as **Louis II** in English) (25 August 1845^[2] – 13 June 1886) was King of Bavaria from 1864 until shortly before his death. He is sometimes called the Swan King (English) and *der Märchenkönig*, the Fairy tale King (German). Additional titles were Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria, Franconia and in Swabia.^[3]

Ludwig is sometimes also called "Mad King Ludwig", though the accuracy of that label has been disputed. His younger brother, Otto, was certifiably insane, thus the claim of hereditary madness was convenient. Because Ludwig was deposed on grounds of mental incapacity without any medical examination, questions about the medical "diagnosis" remain controversial. Adding to the controversy are the mysterious circumstances under which he died. King Ludwig and the doctor assigned to him in captivity at Castle Berg on Lake Starnberg were both found dead in the lake in waist-high water (Ludwig was well-known to be a strong swimmer), the doctor with unexplained injuries to the head and shoulders on the morning of June 13, 1886. ^[4] One of his most quoted sayings was "I wish to remain an eternal enigma to myself and to others."^[5]

Ludwig is best known as an eccentric whose legacy is intertwined with the history of art and architecture. He commissioned the construction of two extravagant palaces and a castle, the most famous being Neuschwanstein, and

was a devoted patron of the composer Richard Wagner. King Ludwig is generally well-liked and even revered by many Bavarians today, many of whom note the irony of his supposed madness and the fact that his legacy of architecture and art and the tourist income they generate help to make Bavaria the richest state in Germany.

Life

Childhood and adolescent years



Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria (left) with his parents and younger brother Prince Otto in 1860.

Born in Nymphenburg Palace (today located in suburban Munich), he was the eldest son of Maximilian II of Bavaria (then Crown Prince) and his wife Princess Marie of Prussia. His parents intended to name him Otto, but his grandfather, Ludwig I of Bavaria, insisted his grandson was to be named after him, since their common birthday, 25 August, is the feast day of Saint Louis, patron saint of Bavaria. A younger brother, born three years later, was named Otto.

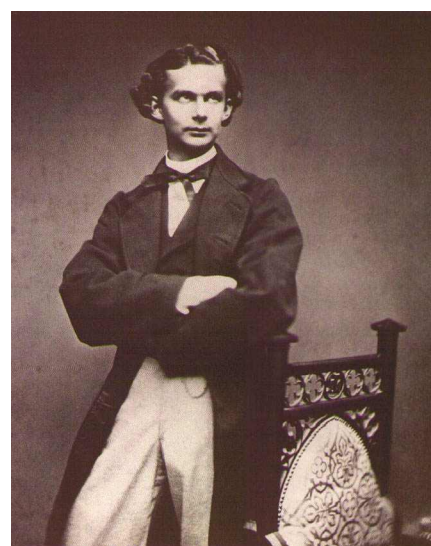
Like many young heirs in an age when Kings governed most of Europe, Ludwig was continually reminded of his royal status. King Maximilian wanted to instruct both of his sons in the burdens of royal duty from an early age.^[6] Ludwig was both extremely indulged and

severely controlled by his tutors and subjected to a strict regimen of study and exercise. There are some who point to these stresses of growing up in a royal family as the causes for much of his odd behavior as an adult. Ludwig was not close with either of his parents.^[7] King Maximilian's advisers had suggested that on his daily walks he might like, at times, to be accompanied by his future successor. The King replied, "But what am I to say to him? After all, my son takes no interest in what other people tell him."^[8] Later, Ludwig would refer to his mother as "my predecessor's consort".^[8] He was far closer to his grandfather, the deposed and notorious King Ludwig I, who came from a family of eccentrics.

Ludwig's childhood years did have happy moments. He lived for much of the time at Castle Hohenschwangau, a fantasy castle his father had built near the Schwansee (Swan Lake) near Füssen. It was decorated in the gothic style with countless frescoes depicting heroic German sagas. The family also visited Lake Starnberg. As an adolescent, Ludwig became close friends with his aide de camp, Prince Paul of Bavaria's wealthy Thurn und Taxis family. The two young men rode together, read poetry aloud, and staged scenes from the Romantic operas of Richard Wagner. The friendship ended when Paul became engaged in 1866. During his youth Ludwig also initiated a lifelong friendship with his half-first cousin once removed, Duchess Elisabeth in Bavaria, later Empress of Austria.^[7] They loved nature and poetry; Elisabeth called Ludwig "Eagle" and he called her "Dove."

Early reign and wars

Crown Prince Ludwig had just turned 18 when his father died after a three-day illness, and he ascended the Bavarian throne.^[8] Although he was not prepared for high office,^[7] his youth and brooding good looks made him popular in Bavaria and elsewhere.^[7] One of the first acts of his reign, a few weeks after his accession, was to summon composer Richard Wagner to his court in Munich.^{[7][9]} Wagner had a notorious reputation as a revolutionary and a philanderer and was constantly on the run from creditors.^[7] Ludwig had admired Wagner since first seeing his opera, *Lohengrin*, at the impressionable age of 15½, followed by *Tannhäuser* ten months later. Wagner's operas appealed to the king's fantasy-filled imagination. On 4 May 1864, the 51-year-old Wagner was given an unprecedented 1¾ hour audience with Ludwig in the Royal Palace in Munich; later the composer wrote of his first meeting with Ludwig, "Alas, he is so handsome and wise, soulful and lovely, that I fear that his life must melt away in this vulgar world like a fleeting dream of the gods."^{[7][9]} The king was likely the saviour of Wagner's career. Without Ludwig, it is doubted that Wagner's later operas would have been composed, much less premiered at the prestigious Munich Royal Court Theatre, now the Bavarian State Opera House.



Ludwig II just after his accession to the throne of Bavaria in 1864

A year after meeting the King, Wagner presented his latest work, *Tristan und Isolde*, in Munich to great acclaim. But the composer's perceived extravagant and scandalous behaviour in the capital was unsettling for the conservative people of Bavaria, and the King was forced to ask Wagner to leave the city six months later, in December 1865.

Ludwig's interest in theatre was by no means confined to Wagner. In 1864, he laid the foundation stone of a new Court Theatre. This theatre is nowadays called the Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz (Gärtnerplatz-Theater). In 1867, he appointed Karl von Perfall Director of the new theatre. Ludwig wished to introduce Munich theatre-goers to the best of European drama. Perfall, under Ludwig's supervision, introduced the public to Shakespeare, Calderón, Mozart, Gluck, Ibsen, Weber and many others. He also raised the standard of interpretation of Schiller, Molière and Corneille.^[10]

Between 1872 and 1885, the King had 209 private performances (*Separatvorstellungen*) given for himself alone or with a guest, in the two court theatres, comprising 44 operas (28 by Wagner, including eight of *Parsifal*), 11 ballets and 154 plays (the principal theme being Bourbon France) at a cost of 97,300 marks.^[11] This was not due so much to misanthropy but, as the King complained to the theatre actor-manager Ernst Possart: "I can get no sense of illusion in the theatre so long as people keep staring at me, and follow my every expression through their opera-glasses. I want to look myself, not to be a spectacle for the masses."

Marriage and homosexuality

The greatest stresses of Ludwig's early reign were pressure to produce an heir, and relations with militant Prussia. Both issues came to the forefront in 1867.



Ludwig II and Duchess Sophie in Bavaria in 1867

Ludwig became engaged to Duchess Sophie in Bavaria, his cousin and the youngest sister of his dear friend, Empress Elisabeth of Austria.^[7] The engagement was publicized on 22 January 1867, but after repeatedly postponing the wedding date, Ludwig finally cancelled the engagement in October. A few days before the engagement had been announced, Sophie had received a letter from the King telling her what she already knew: "The main substance of our relationship has always been ... Richard Wagner's remarkable and deeply moving destiny."^[12] After the engagement was broken off, Ludwig wrote to his former fiancée, "My beloved Elsa! Your cruel father has torn us apart. Eternally yours, Heinrich" (the names Elsa and Heinrich came from characters from Wagner operas)^[12] Ludwig never married, but Sophie later married Ferdinand d'Orléans, duc d'Alençon (1844–1910).

Throughout his reign, Ludwig had a succession of close friendships with men, including his chief equerry and Master of the Horse, Richard Hornig (1843–1911), Hungarian theatre actor Josef Kainz, and courtier Alfons Weber (born c.1862). He began keeping a diary in which he recorded his private thoughts and his attempts to suppress his sexual desires and remain true to his Roman Catholic faith. Ludwig's original diaries from 1869 were lost during World War II, and all that remains today are copies of entries during the 1886 plot to depose him. These questionable copied diary entries, along with private letters and other surviving personal documents, have been said to suggest that Ludwig was homosexual and struggled with his orientation throughout his life.^[13] (Homosexuality had not been punishable in Bavaria since 1813.^[14]) Some earlier diaries have survived in the Geheimes Hausarchiv in Munich and extracts starting in 1858 were published by Evers in 1986.^[15]

The Seven Weeks' War

Relations with Prussia took centre stage starting in 1866. During the Seven Weeks' War, which began in July, Ludwig agreed (as did several other German principalities) to take the side of Austria against Prussia.^[7] When the two sides negotiated the war's settlement, the terms required that Ludwig accept a mutual defense treaty with Prussia.

This treaty placed Bavaria back on the firing line three years later, when the Franco-Prussian War broke out. Prussia and her allies prevailed in this conflict, and an emboldened Prussia now finished her campaign to unify all of the minor German kingdoms into one German Empire under the rule of his uncle Wilhelm I of Prussia, who would now be declared Emperor, or Kaiser.

At the request of Prussian Minister President Bismarck (and in exchange for certain financial concessions), Ludwig wrote a letter (the so-called *Kaiserbrief*) in December 1870 endorsing the creation of the German Empire. With the creation of the Empire, Bavaria lost its status as an independent kingdom and became another state in the empire. Ludwig attempted to protest these alterations by refusing to attend the ceremony where Wilhelm I was proclaimed the new empire's first emperor.^[16] However the Bavarian delegation under Prime Minister Count Otto von Bray-Steinburg had secured a privileged status of the Kingdom of Bavaria within the German Empire (*Reservatrechte*). Within the Empire the Kingdom of Bavaria was even able to retain its own diplomatic body and its own army, which would fall under Prussian command only in times of war.

After the creation of the greater Germany, Ludwig increasingly withdrew from politics, and devoted himself to his personal creative projects, most famously his castles, where he personally approved every detail of the architecture, decoration and furnishing.

Ludwig's castles

Ludwig was notably eccentric in ways that made serving as Bavaria's head of state problematic. He disliked large public functions and avoided formal social events whenever possible, and preferred a life of seclusion that he pursued with various creative projects. He last inspected a military parade on 22 August 1875 and last gave a Court banquet on 10 February 1876.^[17] His mother had foreseen difficulties for Ludwig when she recorded her concern for her extremely introverted and creative son who spent much time day-dreaming. These idiosyncrasies combined with the fact that Ludwig avoided Munich and participating in the government there at all costs, caused considerable tension with the king's government ministers, but did not cost him popularity among the citizens of Bavaria. The king enjoyed traveling in the Bavarian countryside and chatting with farmers and laborers he met along the way. He also delighted in rewarding those who were hospitable to him during his travels with lavish gifts. He is still remembered in Bavaria as *Unser Kini*, which means "our cherished king" in the Bavarian dialect.



The coat of arms of King Ludwig over the entrance to Schloss Neuschwanstein.

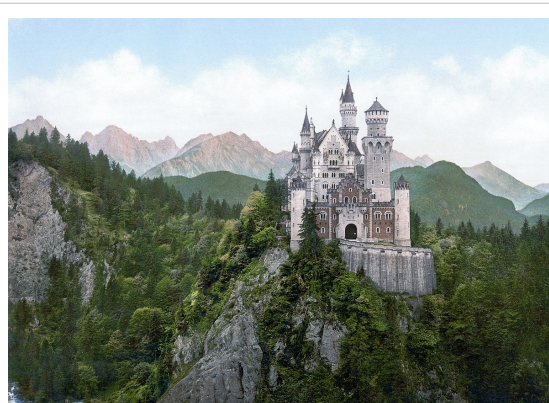
Ludwig also used his personal fortune (supplemented annually from 1873 by 270,000 marks from the Welfenfonds^[18]) to fund the construction of a series of elaborate castles. In 1867 he visited Viollet-le-Duc's work at Pierrefonds, and the Palace of Versailles in France, as well as the Wartburg near Eisenach in Thuringia, which largely influenced the style of their construction. In his letters, Ludwig marveled at how the French had magnificently built up and glorified their culture (e.g., architecture, art, and music) and how miserably lacking Bavaria was in comparison. It became his dream to accomplish the same for Bavaria. These projects provided employment for many hundreds of local labourers and artisans and brought a considerable flow of money to the relatively poor regions where his castles were built. Figures for the total costs between 1869 and 1886 for the building and equipping of each castle were published in 1968: Schloß Neuschwanstein 6,180,047 marks; Schloß Linderhof 8,460,937 marks (a large portion being expended on the Venus Grotto); Schloß Herrenchiemsee (from 1873) 16,579,674 marks^[19] Guide books of the time give 20 German marks = £100 sterling.

In 1868, Ludwig commissioned the first drawings for two of his buildings. The first was *Schloss Neuschwanstein*, or "New Swan Castle on the Rock", a dramatic Romanesque fortress with soaring fairy-tale towers situated on an Alpine crag above Ludwig's childhood home, Castle Hohenschwangau (approximately, "High Swan Region"). Hohenschwangau was a medieval knights' castle which his parents had purchased. Ludwig reputedly had spied the location and conceived of building a castle there while still a boy. The second was Herrenchiemsee, a replica of the palace at Versailles, France, which was sited on the "Herren" Island in the middle of Lake Chiemsee, and was built as a monument to Ludwig's admiration for Louis XIV, the magnificent "Sun King." Only the central portion of the palace was built; all construction halted on the king's death. Herrenchiemsee comprises 8,366 square feet, a "copy in miniature" compared with Versailles' 551, 112 ft². The following year, Ludwig finished the construction of the royal apartment in the Residenz Palace in Munich, to which he had added an opulent conservatory or winter garden on the palace roof. It was started in 1867 as quite a small structure, but after extensions in 1868 and 1871, the dimensions reached 69.5mx17.2mx9.5m high. It featured an ornamental lake complete with skiff, a painted panorama of the Himalayas as a backdrop, an Indian fisher-hut of bamboo, a Moorish kiosk, and an exotic tent. The roof was a technically advanced metal and glass construction. The winter garden was closed in June 1886, partly dismantled the

following year and demolished in 1897.^{[20][21]}

In 1869, Ludwig oversaw the laying of the cornerstone for Schloss Neuschwanstein on a breathtaking mountaintop site. The walls of Neuschwanstein are decorated with frescoes depicting scenes from the legends used in Wagner's operas, including "Tannhäuser," "Tristan and Isolde," "Lohengrin," "Parsifal," and the somewhat less than mystic *Meistersinger*.^[22]

After plans for a monumental festival theatre for Wagner's opera in Munich were thwarted by Court opposition, he supported the construction in 1872-76 of the Festspielhaus in the town of Bayreuth, and attended the dress rehearsal and third public performance of the complete Ring Cycle in 1876. In 1878, construction was completed on Ludwig's Schloss Linderhof, an ornate palace in neo-French Rococo style, with handsome formal gardens. The grounds contained a Venus grotto lit by electricity, where Ludwig was rowed in a boat shaped like a shell. After seeing the Bayreuth performances Ludwig had built in the forest near Linderhof Hunding's Hut (*Hundinghütte*) (based on the stage set of the first act of Wagner's *Die Walküre*) complete with an artificial tree and a sword embedded in it. In *Die Walküre*, Siegfried's father Siegmund, pulls the sword from the tree. Hunding's Hut was destroyed in 1945 but a replica was constructed at Linderhof in 1990. In 1877 a small hermitage (*Einsiedlei des Gurnemanz*) as in the third act of Wagner's *Parsifal* was erected near Hunding's Hut, with a meadow of spring flowers, where the king would retire to read. (A replica made in 2000 can now be seen in the park at Linderhof.) Nearby a Moroccan House, purchased at the Paris World Fair in 1878, was erected alongside the mountain road. Sold in 1891 and taken to Oberammergau it was purchased by the government in 1980 and re-erected in the park at Linderhof after extensive restoration. Inside the palace, iconography reflected Ludwig's fascination with the absolutist government of Ancien Régime France. Ludwig saw himself as the "Moon King", a romantic shadow of the earlier "Sun King", Louis XIV of France. From Linderhof, Ludwig enjoyed moonlit sleigh rides in an elaborate eighteenth-century sleigh, complete with footmen in eighteenth century livery. Also in 1878, construction began on his Versailles-derived Herrenchiemsee.



An 1890s photochrom print of Schloss Neuschwanstein.

In the 1880s, Ludwig's plans proceeded undeterred. He planned construction of a new castle on Falkenstein ("Falcon Rock") near Pfronten in the Allgäu (a place he knew well: a diary entry for 16 October 1867 reads "Falkenstein wild, romantic"^[23]) The first design was a sketch by Christian Jank in 1883 "very much like the Townhall of Liege" (Kreisel 1954, p. 82). Subsequent designs showed a modest villa with a square tower (Dollmann 1884) and a small Gothic castle (Schultze 1884, Hofmann 1886).^[24] a Byzantine palace in the Graswangtal and a Chinese summer palace by the Plansee in Tyrol. By 1885, a road and water supply had been provided at Falkenstein but the old ruins remained untouched,^[25] the other projects never got beyond initial plans.

Controversy and struggle for power

Although the king had paid for his pet projects out of his own funds and not the state coffers,^[26] that did not necessarily spare Bavaria from financial fallout. By 1885, the king was 14 million marks in debt, had borrowed heavily from his family, and rather than economizing, as his financial ministers advised him, he undertook new opulence and new designs without pause. He demanded that loans be sought from all of Europe's royalty, and remained aloof from matters of state. Feeling harassed and irritated by his ministers, he considered dismissing the entire cabinet and replacing them with fresh faces. The cabinet decided to act first.

Seeking a cause to depose Ludwig by constitutional means, the rebelling ministers decided on the rationale that he was mentally ill, and unable to rule. They asked Ludwig's uncle, Prince Luitpold, to step into the royal vacancy once

Ludwig was deposed. Luitpold agreed, so long as the conspirators produced reliable proof that the king was in fact helplessly insane.

Between January and March 1886, the conspirators assembled the *Ärztliches Gutachten* or Medical Report, on Ludwig's fitness to rule. Most of the details in the report were compiled by Count von Holnstein, who was disillusioned with Ludwig and actively sought his downfall. Holnstein used his high rank and bribery to extract a long list of complaints, accounts, and gossip about Ludwig from among the king's servants. The litany of supposed bizarre behavior included his pathological shyness, his avoidance of state business, his complex and expensive flights of fancy, dining out of doors in cold weather and wearing heavy overcoats in summer, sloppy and childish table manners; dispatching servants on lengthy and expensive voyages to research architectural details in foreign lands; and abusive, violent threats to his servants.

While some of these accusations may have been accurate, exactly which, and to what degree, may never be known. The conspirators approached the Imperial Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, who doubted the report's veracity, calling it "rakings from the King's wastepaper-basket and cupboards."^[27] Bismarck commented after reading the Report that "the Ministers wish to sacrifice the King, otherwise they have no chance of saving themselves," and suggested that the matter be brought before the Bavarian Diet and discussed in a session of Parliament, but did not stop the ministers from carrying out their plan.^[28]

In early June, the report was finalized and signed by a panel of four psychiatrists: Dr. Bernhard von Gudden, chief of the Munich Asylum; Dr. Hubert von Grashey (who was Gudden's son-in-law); and their colleagues, a Dr. Hagen and a Dr. Hubrich. The report declared in its final sentences that the king suffered from paranoia, and concluded, "Suffering from such a disorder, freedom of action can no longer be allowed and Your Majesty is declared incapable of ruling, which incapacity will be not only for a year's duration, but for the length of Your Majesty's life." The men had never met the king except Gudden, once, twelve years earlier, nor examined him.^[7]

Deposition

At 4 a.m. on 10 June 1886, a government commission including Holnstein and von Gudden arrived at Neuschwanstein to formally deliver the document of deposition to the king and place him in custody. Tipped off an hour or two earlier by a faithful servant, his coachman Fritz Osterholzer, Ludwig ordered the local police to protect him, and the commissioners were turned back at the castle gate at gun-point. In an especially famous sideshow, the commissioners were attacked by 47-year-old local Baroness (Spera von Truchseß^[29]) loyal to the king, who flailed at the men with her umbrella and then rushed to the king's apartments to identify the conspirators. Ludwig then had the commissioners arrested, but after holding them captive for several hours, had them released.

That same day, the Government publicly proclaimed Luitpold as Prince Regent. The king's friends and allies urged him to flee, or to show himself in Munich and thus regain the support of the people. Ludwig hesitated, instead issuing a statement, allegedly drafted by his aide-de-camp Count Alfred Dürckheim, which was published by a Bamberg newspaper on 11 June:



Ludwig II of Bavaria towards the end of his life
c. 1882

The Prince Luitpold intends, against my will, to ascend to the Regency of my land, and my erstwhile ministry has, through false allegations regarding the state of my health, deceived my beloved people, and is preparing to commit acts of high treason. [...] I call upon every loyal Bavarian to rally around my loyal supporters to

thwart the planned treason against the King and the fatherland.

The government succeeded in suppressing the statement by seizing most copies of the newspaper and handbills. Anton Sailer's pictorial biography of the King prints a photograph of this rare document. (The authenticity of the Royal Proclamation is doubted however, as it is dated 9 June, before the Commission arrived, it uses "I" instead of the royal "We" and there are orthographic errors.) As the king dithered, his support waned. Peasants who rallied to his cause were dispersed, and the police who guarded his castle were replaced by a police detachment of 36 men who sealed off all entrances to the castle.

Eventually the king decided he would try to escape, but it was too late. In the early hours of 12 June, a second commission arrived. The King was seized just after midnight and at 4 a.m. taken to a waiting carriage. He had asked Dr. Gudden, "How can you declare me insane? After all, you have never seen or examined me before." only to be told that "it was unnecessary; the documentary evidence [servants' tittle-tattle] is very copious and completely substantiated. It is overwhelming."^[30] Ludwig was transported to Castle Berg on the shores of Lake Starnberg, south of Munich.

Mysterious death

On 13 June 1886, around 6:00 pm, Ludwig asked Gudden to accompany him on a walk through the Schloß Berg parkland along the shore of Lake Starnberg. Gudden agreed; the walk may even have been his suggestion, and he told the aides not to accompany them. His words were ambiguous ("Es darf kein Pfleger mitgehen") and whether they were meant to follow at a discreet distance is not clear. The two men were last seen at about 6:30 p.m.; they were due back at eight but never returned. After searches were made for more than three hours by the entire castle personnel in a gale with heavy rain, at 11:30 p.m. that night, the bodies of both the King and von Gudden were found, head and shoulders above the shallow water near the shore. The King's watch had stopped at 6:54. Gendarmes patrolling the park had heard and seen nothing.

Ludwig's death was officially ruled a suicide by drowning, but this has been questioned.^{[31][32]} Ludwig was known to have been a very strong swimmer in his youth, the water was approximately waist-deep where his body was found, and the official autopsy report indicated that no water was found in his lungs.^{[31][33]} Ludwig had expressed suicidal feelings during the crisis, but the suicide theory does not fully explain Gudden's death. Gudden's body showed blows to the head and neck and signs of strangulation, leading to the suspicion that he was strangled to death by Ludwig.^[7]



Memorial Cross at the site where the body of Ludwig II was found in the Starnberger Lake

Many hold that Ludwig was murdered by his enemies while attempting to escape from Berg. One account suggests that the king was shot.^[31]

The King's personal fisherman, Jakob Lidl (1864–1933), stated, "Three years after the king's death I was made to swear an oath that I would never say certain things — not to my wife, not on my deathbed, and not to any priest ... The state has undertaken to look after my family if anything should happen to me in either peace time or war." Lidl kept his oath, at least orally, but left behind notes which were found after his death. According to Lidl, he had hidden behind bushes with his boat, waiting to meet the king, in order to row him out into the lake, where loyalists were waiting to help him escape. "As the king stepped up to his boat and put one foot in it, a shot rang out from the bank, apparently killing him on the spot, for the king fell across the bow of the boat."^{[31][34]} However, the autopsy report indicates no scars or wounds found on the body of the dead king; on the other hand, many years later Countess Josephine von Wrba-Kaunitz would show her afternoon tea guests a grey Loden coat with two bullet holes in the back, asserting it was the one Ludwig was wearing.^[35] Another theory

suggests that Ludwig died of natural causes (such as a heart attack or stroke) brought on by the extreme cold (12°C) of the lake during an escape attempt.^[31]

Ludwig's remains were dressed in the regalia of the Order of Saint Hubert, and lay in state in the royal chapel at the Munich Residence Palace. In his right hand he held a posy of white jasmine picked for him by his cousin the Empress Elisabeth of Austria.^[36] After an elaborate funeral on 19 June 1886, Ludwig's remains were interred in the crypt of the Michaelskirche in Munich. His heart, however, does not lie with the rest of his body. Bavarian tradition called for the heart of the king to be placed in a silver urn and sent to the *Gnadenkapelle* (Chapel of the Mercy) in Altötting, where it was placed beside those of his father and grandfather.

Three years after his death, a small memorial chapel was built overlooking the site and a cross erected in the lake. A remembrance ceremony is held there each year on 13 June.

The King was succeeded by his brother Otto, but since Otto was genuinely incapacitated by mental illness, the king's uncle Luitpold remained regent.

Legacy

Most historians believe that Ludwig was deeply peculiar and irresponsible, but the question of clinical insanity remains unresolved.^[4] The brain researcher Heinz Häfner disagreed that there were signs for insanity.^[7] Others believe he may have suffered from the effects of chloroform used in an effort to control chronic toothache rather than any psychological disorder. His cousin Empress Elisabeth held that "The King was not mad; he was just an eccentric living in a world of dreams. They might have treated him more gently, and thus perhaps spared him so terrible an end."

King Ludwig's uncle Luitpold maintained the regency until his own death in 1912 at the age of 91. He was succeeded as regent by his eldest son, also named Ludwig. The regency lasted for 13 months until November 1913, when the new regent, Ludwig, declared the regency at an end, deposed the still-living but still-institutionalized King Otto, and declared himself King Ludwig III of Bavaria. His reign lasted until the end of the First World War, when monarchy in all of Germany came to an end.

Today visitors pay tribute to King Ludwig by visiting his grave as well as his castles. Ironically, the very castles which were said to be causing the king's financial ruin have today become extremely profitable tourist attractions for the Bavarian state. The palaces, given to Bavaria by Ludwig III's son Crown Prince Rupprecht in 1923,^[37] have paid for themselves many times over and attract millions of tourists from all over the world to Germany each year.

Buildings

It is not surprising that Ludwig II had a great interest in building. His paternal grandfather, King Ludwig I, had largely rebuilt Munich. It was known as the 'Athens on the Isar'. His father, King Maximilian II had also continued with more construction in Munich as well as the construction of Hohenschwangau Castle, the childhood home of Ludwig II, near the future Neuschwanstein Castle of Ludwig II. Ludwig II had planned to build a large opera house on the banks of the Isar river in Munich. This plan was vetoed by the Bavarian government.^[38] Using similar plans, a festival theatre was built later in his reign from Ludwig's personal finances at Bayreuth.

- Winter Garden, Residenz Palace, Munich, an elaborate winter garden built on the roof of the Residenz Palace in Munich. It featured an ornamental lake with gardens and painted frescos. It was roofed over using a technically advanced metal and glass construction.^[20] After the death of Ludwig II, it was dismantled in 1897 due to water leaking from the ornamental lake through the ceiling of the rooms below. Photographs and sketches still record this incredible creation which included a grotto, a Moorish kiosk, an Indian royal tent, an artificially illuminated rainbow and intermittent moonlight.^{[20][39]}



Ludwig II's coronation portrait, 1865

- Neuschwanstein Castle,^[40] or "New Swan Stone Castle", a dramatic Romanesque fortress with Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic interiors, which was built high above his father's castle: Hohenschwangau. Numerous wall paintings depict scenes from the legends Wagner used in his operas. Christian glory and chaste love figure predominantly in the iconography, and may have been intended to help Ludwig live up to his religious ideals, but the bedroom decoration depicts the illicit love of Tristan & Isolde (after Gottfried von Strasbourg's poem). The castle was not finished at Ludwig's death; the Kemenate was completed in 1892 but the watch-tower and chapel were only at the foundation stage in 1886 and were never built.^[41] The residence quarters of the King - which he first occupied in May 1884^[42] - can be visited along with the servant's rooms, kitchens as well as the monumental throne room. Unfortunately the throne was never completed although sketches show how it might have looked on completion.^[43]



Schloß Neuschwanstein

Neuschwanstein Castle is a landmark well known by many non-Germans, and was used by Walt Disney in the twentieth century as the inspiration for the Sleeping Beauty Castles at Disneylands around the world. The castle has had over 50 million visitors since it was opened to the public on 1 August 1886, including 1.3 million in 2008 alone.^[44]

- Linderhof Castle, an ornate palace in neo-French Rococo style, with handsome formal gardens. Just north of the palace, at the foot of the Hennenkopf, the park contains a Venus grotto where Ludwig was rowed in a shell-like boat on an underground lake lit with red, green or "Capri" blue effects by electricity, a novelty at that time, provided by one of the first generating plants in Bavaria.^[45] Stories of private musical performances here are probably apochryphal; nothing is known for certain.^[46] In the forest nearby a romantic wooded hut was also built around an artificial tree (see Hundinghütte above).



Linderhof Castle

Inside the palace, iconography reflects Ludwig's fascination with the absolutist government of Ancien Régime France. Ludwig saw himself as the "Moon King", a romantic shadow of the earlier "Sun King", Louis XIV of France. From Linderhof, Ludwig enjoyed moonlit sleigh rides in an elaborate eighteenth century sleigh, complete with footmen in eighteenth century livery. He was known to stop and visit with rural peasants while on rides, adding to his legend and popularity. The sleigh can today be viewed with other royal carriages and sleds at the Carriage Museum (Marstallmuseum) at Nymphenburg Palace in Munich. Its lantern was illuminated by electricity supplied by a battery.^[47] There is also a Moorish Pavilion in the park of Schloß Linderhof.

- Herrenchiemsee, a replica (although only the central section was ever built) of Louis XIV's palace at Versailles, France, which was meant to outdo its predecessor in scale and opulence - for instance, at 98 meters the Hall of Mirrors and its adjoining Halls of War and Peace is slightly longer than the original. The palace is located on the Herren Island in the middle of the Chiemsee Lake. Most of the palace was never completed once the king ran out of money, and Ludwig lived there for only 10 days in October 1885, less than a year before his mysterious death.^[42] It is interesting to note that tourists come from France to view the recreation of the famous Ambassadors' Staircase. The original Ambassadors' Staircase at Versailles was demolished in 1752.^[48]



- Ludwig also outfitted Schachen king's house with an overwhelmingly decorative Arabian style interior, including a replica of the famous Peacock Throne. There are allegations of luxurious parties with the king sometimes reclining in the role of Turkish sultan while the most handsome soldiers and stable boys served him as scantily clad dancers.
- Falkenstein, a planned, but never executed "robber baron's castle" in the Gothic style. A painting by Christian Jank shows the proposed building as an even more fairytale version of Neuschwanstein, perched on a rocky cliff high above Castle Neuschwanstein.

Ludwig II left behind a large collection of plans and designs for other castles that were never built, as well as plans for further rooms in his completed buildings. Many of these designs are housed today in the King Ludwig II Museum at Herrenchiemsee Castle. These building designs date from the latter part of the King's reign, beginning around 1883. As money was starting to run out, the artists knew that their designs would never be executed. The designs became more extravagant and numerous as the artists realized that there was no need to concern themselves with economy or practicality.

Ludwig and the arts

It has been said that Richard Wagner's late career is part of Ludwig's legacy, since he almost certainly would have been unable to complete his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* or to write his final opera, *Parsifal*, without the king's support.

Ludwig also sponsored the premieres of *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and, through his financial support of the Bayreuth Festival, those of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Parsifal*.^[49]

Ludwig provided Munich with its Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz, establishing a lasting tradition of performing the best of European drama.

Ludwig in popular culture

Literature, stage, games, and film

- The 1972 film *Ludwig*, directed by Luchino Visconti was based on his life. It traces the life of Ludwig II from his accession to death, and stars Helmut Berger as Ludwig II and Romy Schneider as the Austrian Empress Elisabeth.
- The 1972 German film *Ludwig - Requiem für einen jungfräulichen König* (*Ludwig - Requiem for a Virgin King*), written and directed by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg provides a more personal, sympathetic and idiosyncratic account of the King's life from his boyhood to his death. It stars Harry Baer and Balthasar Thomass as Ludwig II, and Gerhard Maerz and Anette Tirier as Richard Wagner.
- An earlier film, directed by Helmut Kautner, entitled *Ludwig II* (1955), starred O. W. Fischer in the role of Ludwig II and Ruth Leuwerik in the role of Empress Elisabeth.
- An epic film, *Wagner* (1983), directed by Tony Palmer, on the life of Richard Wagner, starring Richard Burton in the role of Wagner, also features László Gálffi in the substantial role of King Ludwig.
- The early 21st century play *Valhalla* by playwright Paul Rudnick prominently features Ludwig as the play unfolds in 19th century Bavaria and 1940s Texas.
- A play by Jordan Harrison, "Doris to Darlene: A Cautionary Valentine," features Ludwig II and his relationship with Wagner as two central characters. It premiered at Playwrights Horizons in New York in December 2007.
- The three-volume manga series *Ludwig II* (ルートヴィヒII世) by the artist You Higuri, published by Kadokawa Shoten, is a highly fictionalized account of Ludwig's love life.
- The Busch Gardens Williamsburg ride The Curse of DarKastle features Ludwig as a king whose parents, and later, party guests "mysteriously disappeared", and who now haunts his old castle terrorizing guests riding golden sleighs. As with Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within, werewolves figure in the ride.
- Takarazuka Revue has adopted the life of the emperor for a musical production.
- Ludwig figures in *The Alabaster Egg*, a novel by Gillian Freeman.
- There is an anecdote of the death of Ludwig II by T. S. Eliot in the first stanza of *The Waste Land*.
- Sharyn McCrumb's 1984 mystery novel *Sick of Shadows* features a character who identifies with Ludwig II and builds a replica of Neuschwanstein castle in Georgia. The novel also acts out a few more disturbing incidents from Ludwig's life.



Ludwig II with Richard Wagner, the composer of *Lohengrin* and many other romantic operas, at the piano

- The 1993 novel *Sherlock in Love* by Sena Jeter Naslund features an appearance by the Mad King Ludwig.
- In the 1993 film *Ludwig 1881*, Helmut Berger reprises his role as Ludwig II in an episode involving the actor Josef Kainz, who is invited to accompany the king on a cruise on a Swiss lake, in order to recreate scenes from a story which actually took place around the lake.
- The story of Ludwig II is discussed by the characters of the 1947 novel *Doktor Faustus* by Thomas Mann, in chapter XL.
- Ludvig II is a prominent character in the 1995 computer game *Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within*.
- Ludwig II is a prominent character in the 1994 steampunk/fantasy role-playing game *Castle Falkenstein*. In the game world, Ludwig's death was really an abduction by the faerie folk of New Europa. His real-world eccentricities are an asset to Bavaria because they allow him to work with faeries and other magical creatures more effectively than his rivals in Prussia.
- Ludwig's life and 'swan obsession' features in 'The Secret Crown', by author Chris Kuzneski. The book focuses on the 2 main characters following a trail that leads to them investigating Ludwig's life and castles in hopes of finding his secret treasure.

Music

- *Illusions like 'Swan Lake'*, a restaging of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* by John Neumeier to reflect the life of Ludwig II.
- A number of musicals based on the life of Ludwig II have been staged. One was called, *Ludwig: The Musical* by Rolf Rettburg and another, *Ludwig II: Longing For Paradise* with music by Franz Hummel and lyrics by Stephen Barbarino. A special theatre was constructed on the shores of the lake at Fussen, not far from Castles Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein, specifically for the musical performances.
- The Clean's spoken-word song *Ludwig*, and Amon Duul II's 1975 song of the same name are about him.
- The electronic duo Matmos recorded a song entitled "Banquet for King Ludwig II of Bavaria" on their 2006 album *The Rose Has Teeth in the Mouth of a Beast*.
- Electronic music composer Klaus Schulze wrote the song "Ludwig II von Bayern" on his album *X*, a concept album of six "musical biographies" evoking contemporary or historical intellectuals with an influence on Schulze.
- In 2010, the German power metal group Freedom Call released a concept album about the life of King Ludwig II, called *Legend of the Shadowking*.

Titles, styles, honours and arms

Titles and styles

- **25 August 1845 - 28 March 1848** *His Royal Highness* Prince Ludwig of Bavaria
- **28 March 1848 - 10 March 1864** *His Royal Highness* The Crown Prince of Bavaria
- **10 March 1864 – 13 June 1886** *His Majesty* The King [of Bavaria]

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Notes

- [1] He was originally named *Otto Ludwig* and Friedrich Wilhelm was his father, but on 8 Sept. 1845 he was called Ludwig, after his grandfather, who was born on the same day (St Ludwig's Day). See Böhm 1924, pp. 1f; Chapman-Huston 1955, p. 4; Schlim 2005, p. 5.
- [2] At 00.28 hours: J.G. Wolf 1922, p. 16. Compare Ludwig's remark to Anton Niggel on 11/12 June 1886 about being born & going to die at 12.30 (Hacker 1966, p. 363 quoting Gerold 1914, pp. 91-3)
- [3] See e.g., *Adreßbuch von München* 1876, p. 1.
- [4] Desing, 1996.

- [5] "Ein ewig Rätsel bleiben will ich mir und anderen." In a letter dated 27 April 1876 to the actress Marie Dahn-Hausmann (1829-1909), whom he may have regarded as a kind of substitute mother (published by Conrad in *Die Propyläen* 17, Munich, 9 July 1920). The words are based on a passage in Schiller's 1803 drama *Die Braut von Messina* II/1.
- [6] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 6.
- [7] "Der Mythos vom Märchenkönig" (http://www.focus.de/wissen/bildung/deutsche_geschichte/tid-22518/125-todestag-der-mythos-vom-maerchenkoenig_aid_632826.html). focus.de. 2010-06-12. . Retrieved 2011-06-14.
- [8] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 12.
- [9] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 25.
- [10] Rall, Petzet and Merta (2001), *King Ludwig II*
- [11] See Kurt Hommel: *Die Separatvorstellungen vor König Ludwig II. von Bayern* (Munich, 1963)
- [12] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 40.
- [13] McIntosh, 1982, pp. 155–158.
- [14] Till 2010, p. 48
- [15] Hans Gerhard Evers: *Ludwig II. von Bayern. Theaterfürst-König-Bauherr* (Munich, 1986)
- [16] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 37.
- [17] Hojer 1986, p. 138
- [18] Gerhard Hojer (ed.): *König Ludwig II.-Museum Herrenchiemsee. Katalog* (Munich, 1986, p. 137)
- [19] Petzet Katalog 1968, p. 226.
- [20] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 18.
- [21] See *Die Wintergarten König Ludwigs II. in der Münchener Residenz* by Elmar D. Schmid in Gerhard Hojer (ed.): *König Ludwig II. Museum Herrenchiemsee. Katalog*. (Munich, 1986), pp. 62-94 & 446-451.
- [22] "The pictures in the new castle shall follow the sagas and not Wagner's interpretation of them." Letter from footman Adalbert Welker to Court secretary Ludwig von Bürkel 5 April 1879 (Petzet 1970, p. 138)
- [23] Evers 1986, p. 228.
- [24] See Petzet Katalog 1968 & Hojer 1986, pp. 298-304 for details.
- [25] Hojer 1986, p. 300.
- [26] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 73.
- [27] Blunt 1970, p.216
- [28] <http://schwangu.de/646.0.html>
- [29] Esperanza Truchsess von Wetzhausen née von Sarachaga, of Spanish descent, born Petersburg 1839, married 1862 Friedrich Truchsess von Wetzhausen (1825-94); died after 1909: Böhm 1922, p. 600.
- [30] name=nohbauer82
- [31] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 88.
- [32] von Burg, 1989, p. 315.
- [33] von Burg, 1989, p. 308.
- [34] von Burg, 1989, p. 311.
- [35] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,515924,00.html>
- [36] Nohbauer, 1998, p. 86.
- [37] "Princess Irmingard of Bavaria" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/8118338/Princess-Irmingard-of-Bavaria.html>). *The Daily Telegraph* (London). 8 November 2010. .
- [38] Petzet and Neumeister, 1995, p. 24.
- [39] Calore, 1998, pp. 164-165.
- [40] First so-called only in 1891: Baumgartner 1981, p. 78
- [41] Hojer 1986, p. 294
- [42] Merta 2005, p. 190
- [43] Calore, 1998, p. 89.
- [44] Till 2010, p. 34
- [45] Petzet 1970, p. 144
- [46] Petzet 1970, p. 146
- [47] Petzet 1968, no. 780
- [48] Calore, 1998, p. 60.
- [49] See Detta & Michael Petzet 1970, passim

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